



## **Silver Star: Staff Sgt. Matthew Matlock**

### **Paratrooper earns Silver Star for heroism while helping to save comrades in Afghanistan**

**By Rick Scavetta**

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**VICENZA, Italy (Nov. 30, 2009)** -- Hundreds of maroon-bereted Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team gathered Nov. 30 to honor fellow paratrooper Staff Sgt. Matthew Matlock of Company C, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, for actions he took under fire to save Soldiers in Afghanistan.

The paratroopers stood at attention at Caserma Ederle's post theater as Maj. Gen. William B. Garrett III, commander of U.S. Army Africa, fastened the Silver Star to Matlock's uniform.

During the ceremony, Matlock's thoughts turned to guys who were with him that day and what they endured, he said. He said he was just doing his job, not something for which he deserved a medal. Soldiers in combat are brothers, like family, he added.



**BARBARA ROMANO**

Maj. Gen. William B. Garrett III, commander of U.S. Army Africa, attaches the Silver Star to Staff Sgt. Matthew Matlock's uniform, during a ceremony at the post theater on Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy, Nov. 30. Matlock, of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team's Company C, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, earned the medal for actions he took under fire to save Soldiers in Afghanistan.

"They were wounded and couldn't fight back. I was going to make sure they made it out of there," Matlock said. "They would have done it for me, so I did it for them."

Still, a day seldom passes when Matlock doesn't think about June 20, 2008, when his convoy was moving through Zerok, in Afghanistan's Paktika province.

"It was one of those days," Matlock said. "We were on our way back to Orgun-E from our last mission. We were getting ready to go home."

Just a few miles from their destination, the patrol drove into enemy fighters who attacked Matlock's patrol with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades.

"Everything broke loose. We kept trying to push through. But they targeted our truck with RPGs and disabled it," Matlock said. "They just kept hitting us one after the other, until finally the truck caught on fire and I had to get everybody out of there."

An RPG struck an external fuel tank, sending flames and shrapnel inside -- seriously wounding three Soldiers from Matlock's squad. Under direct fire and wounded himself, Matlock evacuated his injured comrades and treated them with first aid. He fired back and directed his squad to shoot at enemy positions.

But RPGs poured in, sending hot metal fragments through the air. Each time, Matlock used his body to shield fellow Soldiers, receiving shrapnel wounds in the process. That's where training pays off, allowing instincts to take over, Matlock said.

"You never know, really, what you're made of until you're put into that situation," Matlock said. "You don't really think about anything else except getting your guys out of there. That was all that was going through my head -- these guys are going to make it home. And I made sure of that."

Eighteen months passed since that day in Afghanistan. Matlock listened from the theater's front row as Garrett spoke of his actions.

"Staff Sgt. Matlock fought with such incredible bravery, deliberately putting himself at risk time and time again to save the lives of his men," Garrett said. "He stepped forward without hesitation and did everything we expect of a seasoned combat leader of any rank."

Matlock, 26, a native of Amarillo, Texas, followed in the footsteps of his father, William Matlock, a retired U.S. Army Special Forces master sergeant. In 2002, he joined the infantry and completed airborne training before joining 1-503rd, the battalion known as "First Rock," where he served in the scout platoon sniper section. In March 2003, Matlock served a yearlong tour in Iraq. In 2005, he served a year in Afghanistan. Afterward, Matlock joined Company C, 1-503rd, rising from team leader to squad leader. In 2007, Matlock deployed again to Afghanistan. It was during that second Afghanistan

tour when his actions merited the Silver Star, the military's third-highest award, given only for valor and gallantry in combat.

Matlock currently serves as a weapons squad leader with Company C. This month, he returns to Afghanistan with his unit. He says he's inspired by young volunteers filling the ranks who are "ready to learn and ready to fight," knowing they will be sent into harm's way. During training, he pushes his troops to their limits, to prepare them for combat. He hopes his recognition sets an example and the standard for other Soldiers.

"Everything we're going to do is real life-and-death situations," Matlock said. I just want them to know it's real. The bullets are real out there. It's not a game."



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